

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 1CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR  
22 August 1985

# Feisty Texan, who sees Congress as soft on communists, aids 'contras' with hard cash

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Austin, Texas

**S**HE has put boots on the "contras' " feet. And now, convinced the rebels fighting to overthrow Nicaragua's Sandinista government are working for her freedom as well as their own, she has bought them a helicopter.

"I just couldn't stand to think of those brave men dying on the battlefield because they had no means of getting to [medical] help," says Ellen Garwood, an elderly but razor-sharp Texan who vigorously defends what she calls the "cause of world freedom."

Mrs. Garwood achieved national notoriety last week when retired Army Gen. John K. Singlaub disclosed to the New York Times that the Austin author and heiress had donated \$65,000 toward purchase of a medical evacuation helicopter. The contribution made Garwood the largest donor to General Singlaub's Council for World Freedom, a Phoenix-Ariz.-based anticommunist organization helping to raise private donations for the contras.

Seated in the book-stuffed library of the Austin home she shares with husband, W. St. John Garwood, a retired Texas Supreme Court justice, Garwood talks of buying a helicopter for insurgents in Central America as others might tell of buying footballs for an ill-equipped local

team. In her eyes, it's a civic duty.

"The general [Singlaub] told me he had a chance to buy a helicopter relatively cheap, but he still needed \$65,000," recalls Garwood, who keeps up with the contras' cause through a network of organizations, newsletters, and like-minded individuals. Earlier she had donated \$50,000 to buy boots for the contras.

"I didn't say right away that I'd give [the money] to him. I said I'd try to raise it among people I knew," she adds. But she wasn't very successful.

"People said they supported the cause, but that it is something for the government to do."

"I agree that it is," she says. "But when you have a Congress that doesn't do its duty, it's like when your house is burning down and the fire department doesn't come. The private citizen has to act."

Garwood says she did raise a little — \$500 from an Austin real estate dealer, a few hundred from a Texas rancher. But in the end, "after checking how much I had left in the bank account," she decided to give the money herself.

In her honor, the helicopter will be named the Lady Ellen.

The fact that Mrs. Garwood found raising even a few hundred dollars so difficult, even among sympathetic acquaint-

ances, appears to fly in the face of recent claims that millions in private American donations — up to \$25 million, when rolled in with foreign contributions — have reached the contras.

In light of her experience, where is that kind of money coming from? Garwood says that, first of all, the news media have probably exaggerated the figure, "as they usually do." And some of the donations actually come in the form of desperately needed goods, she adds.

But she also guesses that the Nicaraguan Freedom Fund, founded by former Treasury Secretary William E. Simon earlier this year, has had greater success in filling the donation plate. "Bill Simon knows a lot of millionaires in the East," she says. By contrast, she believes "little Austin" has relatively few wealthy people, and in addition "is rather socialistically minded because of the University [of Texas] presence."

She adamantly rejects the suggestion furthered by some observers of Central America that part of the money may still be coming through American intelligence organizations. Such funding was cut off last year, although Congress recently reversed itself and voted \$27 million in humanitarian assistance.

"We are a country of law, not of whim," she says, insisting that US government assistance ended when Congress "so foolishly" voted to cut off aid.

She maintains with equal fervor that Lady Ellen will be used only for humanitarian missions, in accord with the limits Congress has placed on public assistance.

"If General Singlaub found out it was being used for military operations, he'd withdraw it," she says.

Despite this fastidiousness, Garwood has no qualms in stating that the desired end of her assistance is to help the contras overthrow the Sandinista government. "Negotiation is not a valid alternative," she says. "Negotiation with communists always comes out in their favor."

She says overthrowing a foreign government is justified when, as she believes is the case in Nicaragua, world freedom is threatened.

"If they . . . [they in her speech almost always referring to Soviet-backed communists]. If they are allowed to take Central America, then we are threatened. And if the United States, the world's last hope, is threatened, then freedom everywhere is threatened."

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